

Colorism in the African American Community History, Systems, Culture, and Context

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Colorism

Skin color stratification – related to skin tone

A process that privileges lighter skinned people of color over dark in areas such as

- Income
- Education
- Housing
- Media
- Marriage market

In the lives of people of color. . .

- **Race/Racism Matters.** Almost every indicator of well-being shows troubling disparities/ disproportionality by race within class groupings.
- **Class Matters.** Poverty is a significant obstacle to success. Yet, within-class racial disparities remain.
- **Place Matters.** Access to resources is connected to spaces. (rural, urban, suburban), and these spaces are often “racialized.”
- **Self Determination & Personal Responsibility Matter.** Everyone should have a voice in matters that affect them.
- **History Matters.** Today’s trends and practices emerged out of yesterdays choices, policies, practices.
- **Culture Matters.** Tools for well-being; inoculation against and countering microaggressions and racism are essential.

Institutions/Systems that contribute....

- Education
- Employment
- Housing
- Transportation
- Health
- Adult Justice System
- Juvenile Justice System
- Child Welfare System
- Environment
- Financial
- Media, etc.

**The insidious American and global
context of race, class, & power**

Fosters.....COLORISM

Roots & presence of colorism

- European colonialism (stretching throughout and beyond Africa to Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, Australia, etc.)
- Plantation life for enslaved African Americans
- Early class hierarchies of Asia
- Mexico: lighter skinned Spaniards had more power and resources than darker skinned Indians

Colorism is maintained by

- A system of White racism/supremacy
 - Aesthetic, ideological, material
 - Predicated on the notion that
 - Dark skin represents
 - Savagery
 - Irrationality
 - Ugliness
 - Hypersexuality
 - Inferiority
- By internalized racism

Colorism is contrasted with

- White skin and whiteness – represented as
 - Civility
 - Rationality
 - Beauty
 - Superiority
 - Culture
 - Morality
 - Goodness

Colorism can be....

- Overt – outright discrimination
(employment, income/pay scales, housing, promotions, etc)
- Covert – subtle cues of disfavor
(who gets called on in the class or selected for various things, perceptions of attractiveness)

Colorism reflects internalized racism....

- Turning upon ourselves, our families, friends and our people the racial beliefs, attitudes, practices, and oppression inflicted on us by the dominant society.
- Emulating and identifying with the oppressor.
- Incorporating the stereotypes into our own cultural values and traditions.
- The oppression becomes a cultural norm passed on from one generation to the next.

Internalized racism - steps

Fanon

- Group subjected to forced entry to exploit
- Self-doubt
- Identity confusion
- Emergence of feelings of inferiority

Internalized racism - steps

E.J.R. David (2014)

- Internalize the negative stereotype
- Deny you authentic identity (try to act like the group held up as the standard)
- Deny being oppressed
- Intragroup fragmentation, conflict, and discrimination (group turns on its own members, emulate the oppressor, mistrust each other, have unrealistic expectations of their leaders, and do self destructive violence toward own self)

Internalized racism - formats

Speight (2007)

- Exploitation
- Marginalization
- Powerlessness
- Systemic violence
- *Cultural imperialism*

Internalized racism

- Affects individual and collective self-esteem
- Can contribute to depression, feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, learned helplessness, shame, humiliation and decreased well-being
- Because it is learned it *can be unlearned*

Some of what we know about colorism builds on attractiveness research

- Attractiveness is a cultural construct influenced by racial aesthetics
- Perceptions of physical attractiveness influence attributions about people such as
 - Smarter
 - Friendlier etc
- Lighter skinned people may benefit from the halo effect attributions about people

Colorism in schools

- Teacher and principal expectations (lighter students smarter, from better families, better behaved etc....negatively affect student achievement)
- School suspension differences based on skin tone
- School completion rates differ (eg., lighter Mexican Americans complete more years of school than darker Mexican Americans) (Murgita & Telles, 1996)

to handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's aspirations

It is strange, then that the friends of truth and the promoters of freedom have not risen up against the present propaganda in the schools and crushed it.

This crusade is much more important than the anti-lynching movement, because there would be no lynching if it did not start in the classroom."

(Dr. Carter G. Woodson, early 1900s)

ROOT CAUSE & ACTION

We can't breathe!



We can't breathe because of THE LIE.

Colorism exists because of THE LIE

The Lie is an – Ideology

“a system of ideas and practices that sustain social relations of domination & oppression”

(Neslon and Prilleltensky, 2015)

What is The LIE?

- African people have contributed nothing to humanity.
- Africa is a primitive, backwards place.
- Nothing of worth and value came out of Africa
- Black people are not human beings.
- Black lives are not valuable.
- Black people are not worthy of equal rights and fair treatment.
- Black people lack intelligence, morals, discipline...

The Lie is.....

- Multigenerational
- Multifaceted and multi-layered
- Unyielding and self-perpetuating
- Internalized

A Never Ending Assault

Ongoing Trauma/Stress

not

“Post” Traumatic Stress

MULTIGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

CONTINUED

→ Racism and Dehumanization

Unmitigated

→ RACIAL STRESS

“Even at the dawn of the 21st century, racism remains a suffocating blanket that does not allow us to breathe.”

Bulhan: Frantz Fanon & the Psychology of Oppression



“If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself.”

Dr. Carter G. Woodson

BIKO AND SOLIDARITY



BLACK PEOPLE'S CONVENTION
TRIBUTE TO THE LATE
HONORARY PRESIDENT
BANTU STEPHEN BIKO

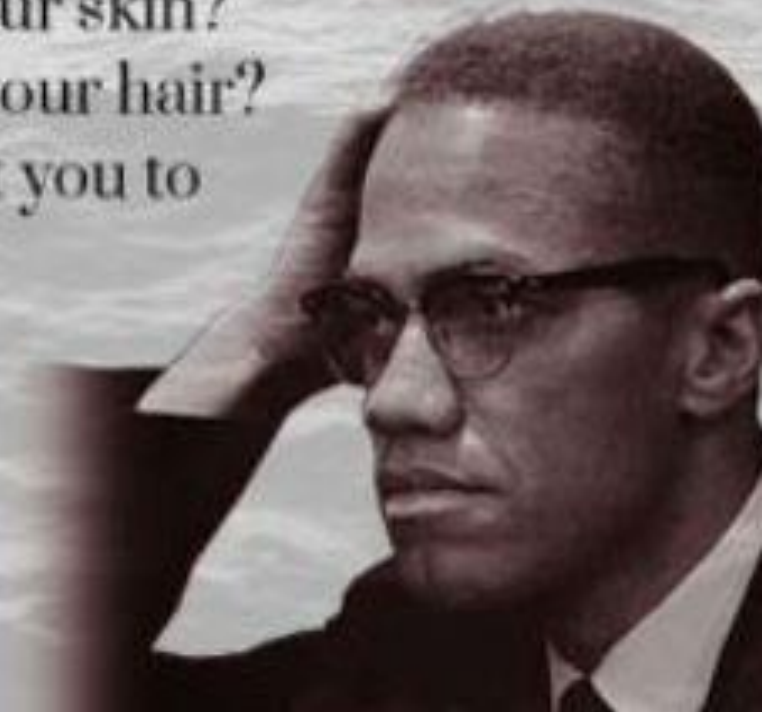
One Azania: One Nation

*“The most potent
weapon
in the hands of the
oppressor
is the mind of the
oppressed.....” ~ Steve
Biko (1978, p. xix)*

Brother Malcolm

“Who taught you to hate the color of your skin?
Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair?
[...] you should ask yourself who taught you to
hate being what God made you.”

Malcolm X (1925-1965)



“The school, the history books, the comic strips, the theatre halls – all these also enforce cognitive dissonance and even self-hate. ”

Bulhan on Fanon, p. 191

- **Harriett Tubman:** “I freed thousands of slaves. I could have freed thousands more, if they knew they were slaves.”
- **Tom Burrell:** *Why, after all this time, when calculating the achievement of the ‘American Dream,’ are [Black people] still ranked at the bottom of almost every ‘good’ list, and at the top of the ‘bad’ lists?*
- **Nelson Mandela:** “It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.”
- **Wade Nobles:** “Power is the ability to define reality and have others accept it as their own.”
- **Dr. Na’im Akbar** *“When it all comes down to it, it’s what we do for us that is going to make the difference... We’ve got to raise our sons and daughters so that they understand the beauty and the power of who they are.”*

“The psychic suffocation increases with each progressive step in the colonial education.”

Bulhan on Fanon, p. 191

“The closer the schoolboy gets to the social circle of the oppressor, the more he learns to disparage what he is by birth and race.”

Bulhan on Fanon, p. 191

The Work Ahead: Overcoming the Lie

- The **LIE** of Black inferiority — Used to justify the enslavement and subjugation of African people for centuries — that is very much still with us
- Rebuilding the community safety net

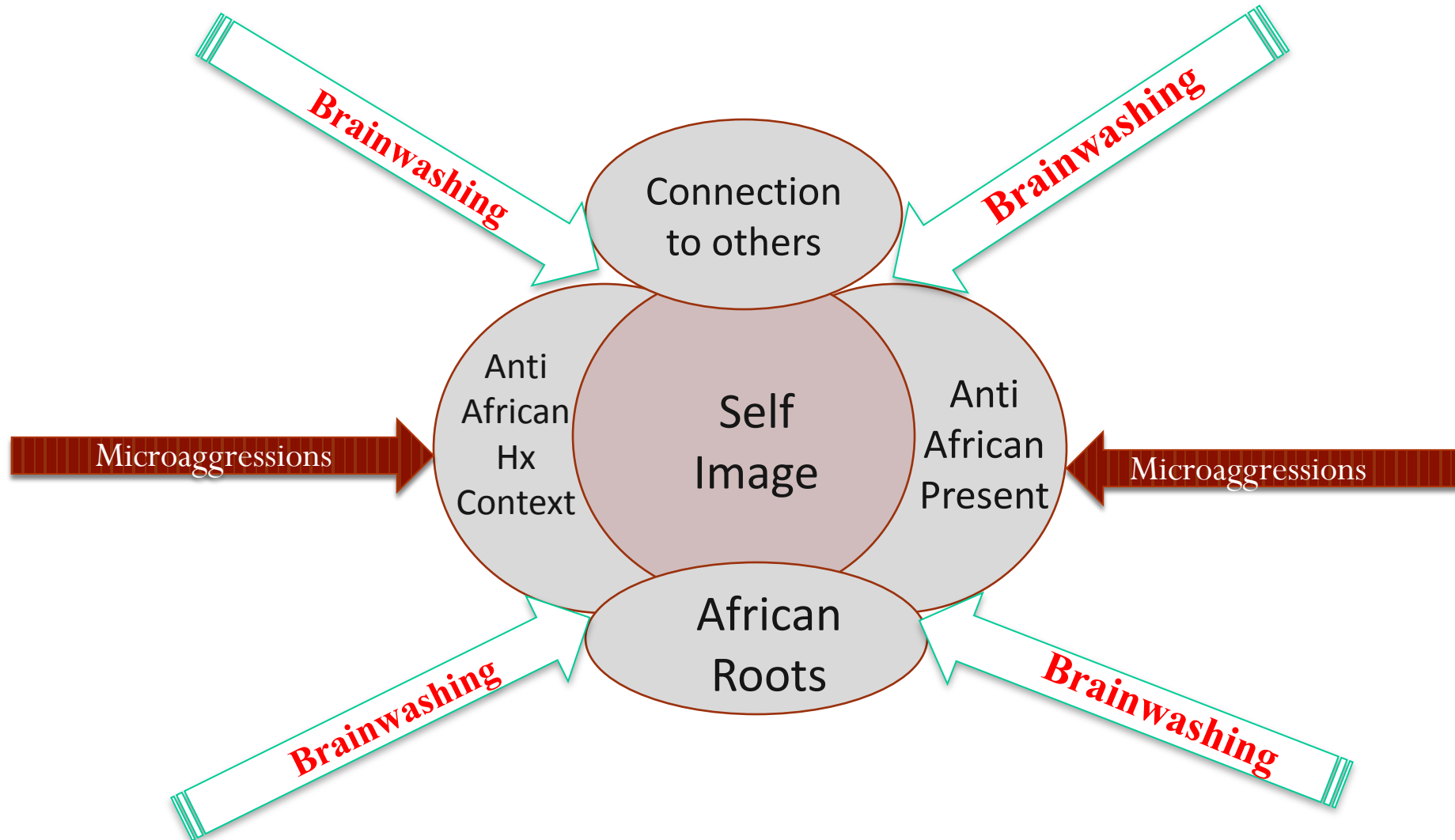
Embracing the Truth

The capacity to *triumph*-- “to make a way out of no way” reflects our:

- Resilience grounded in our cultural foundation
- Ongoing quest for emotional emancipation
- Capacity to *transform* through experiencing, all that initially was foreign, while maintaining an essential African core

The Psychology Behind the Lie and Its Staying Power

Multi-generational – Multi-pronged Assault

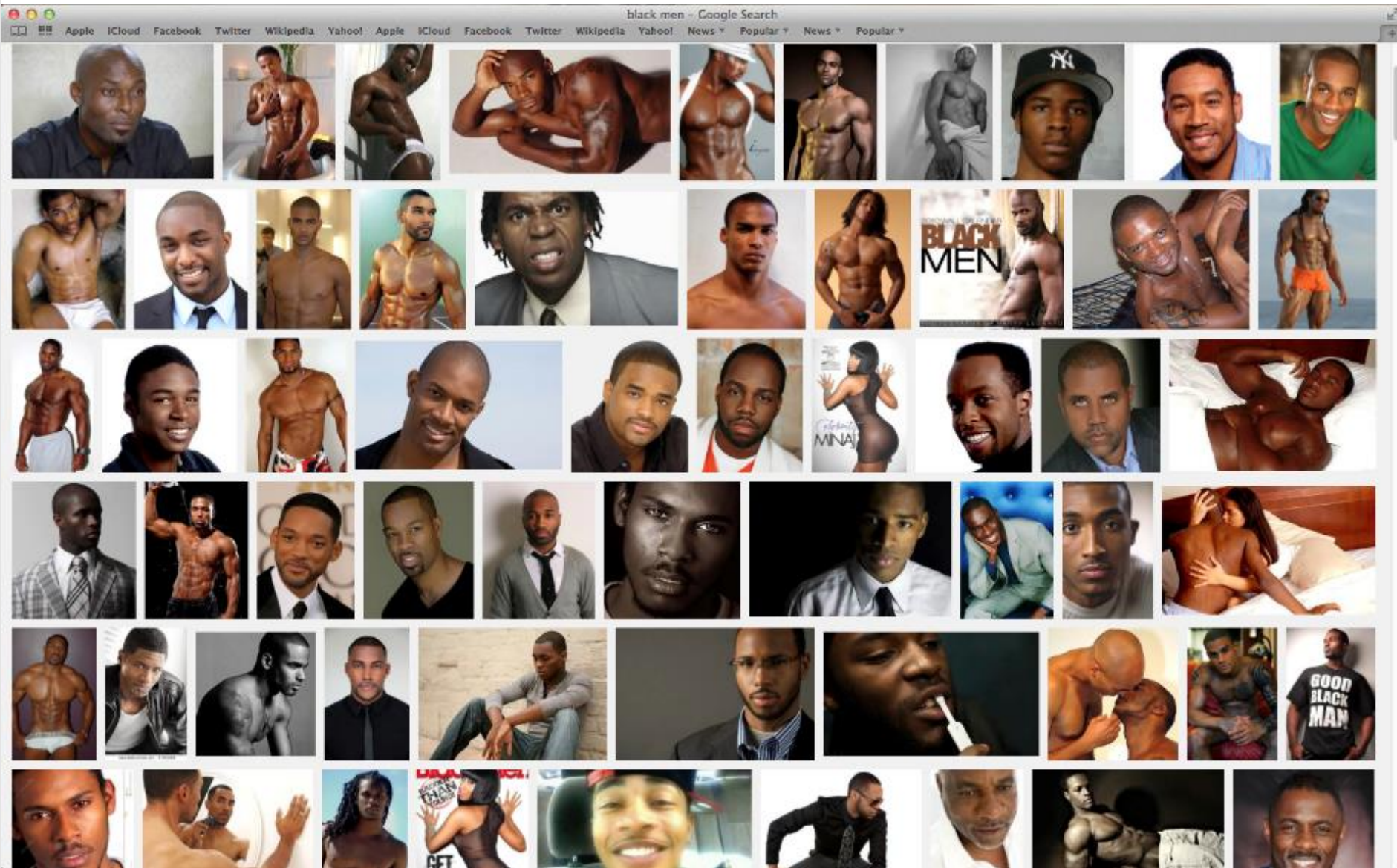


Cognitive Tendencies

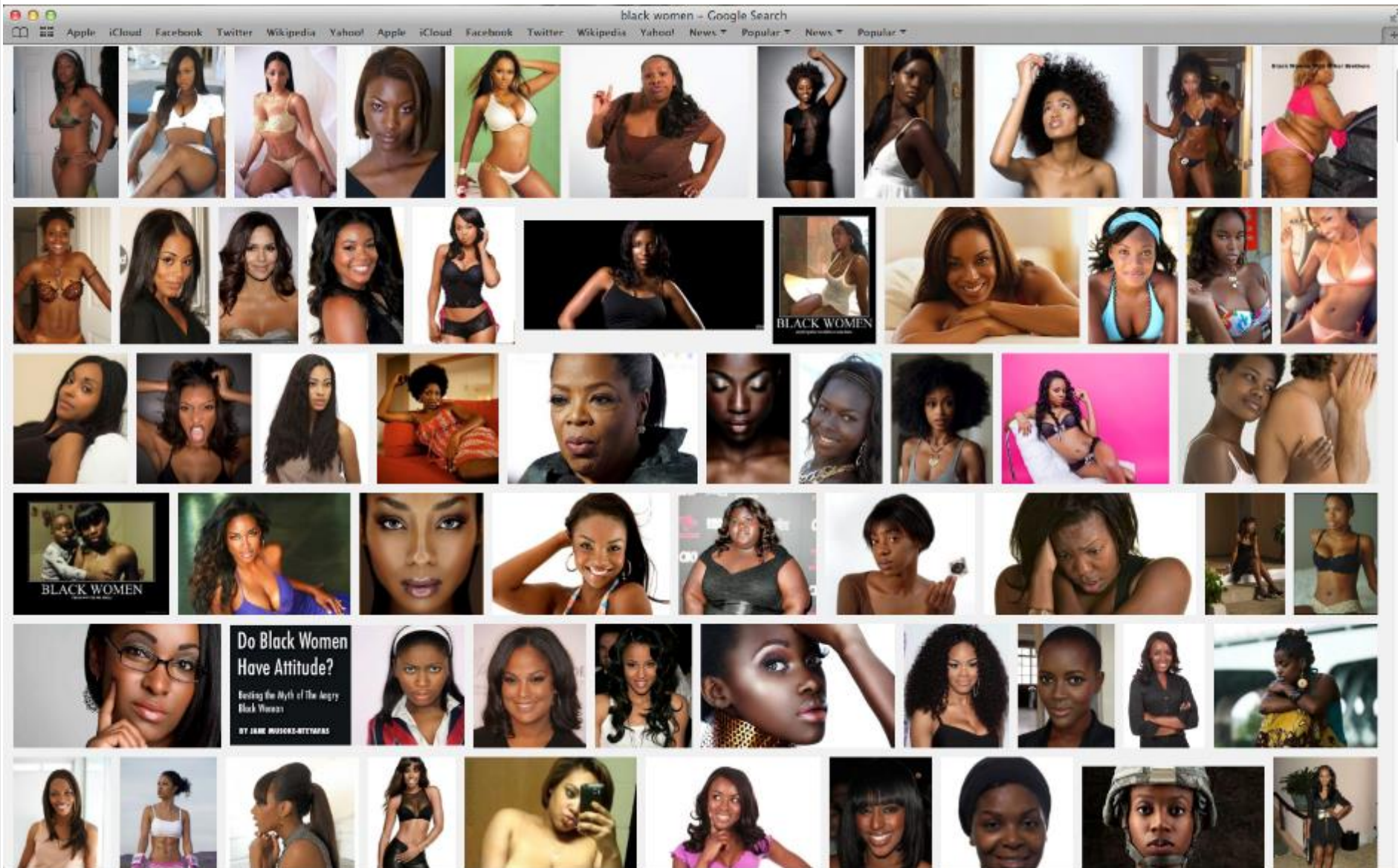
Confirmation Bias

- we more eagerly seek out and favor evidence verifying our ideas rather than evidence refuting them (Klayman & Ha, 1987; Skov & Sherman, 1986).
- we evade facts, become inconsistent, or systematically defend ourselves against the threat of new information relevant to an issue (Wason, 1981)

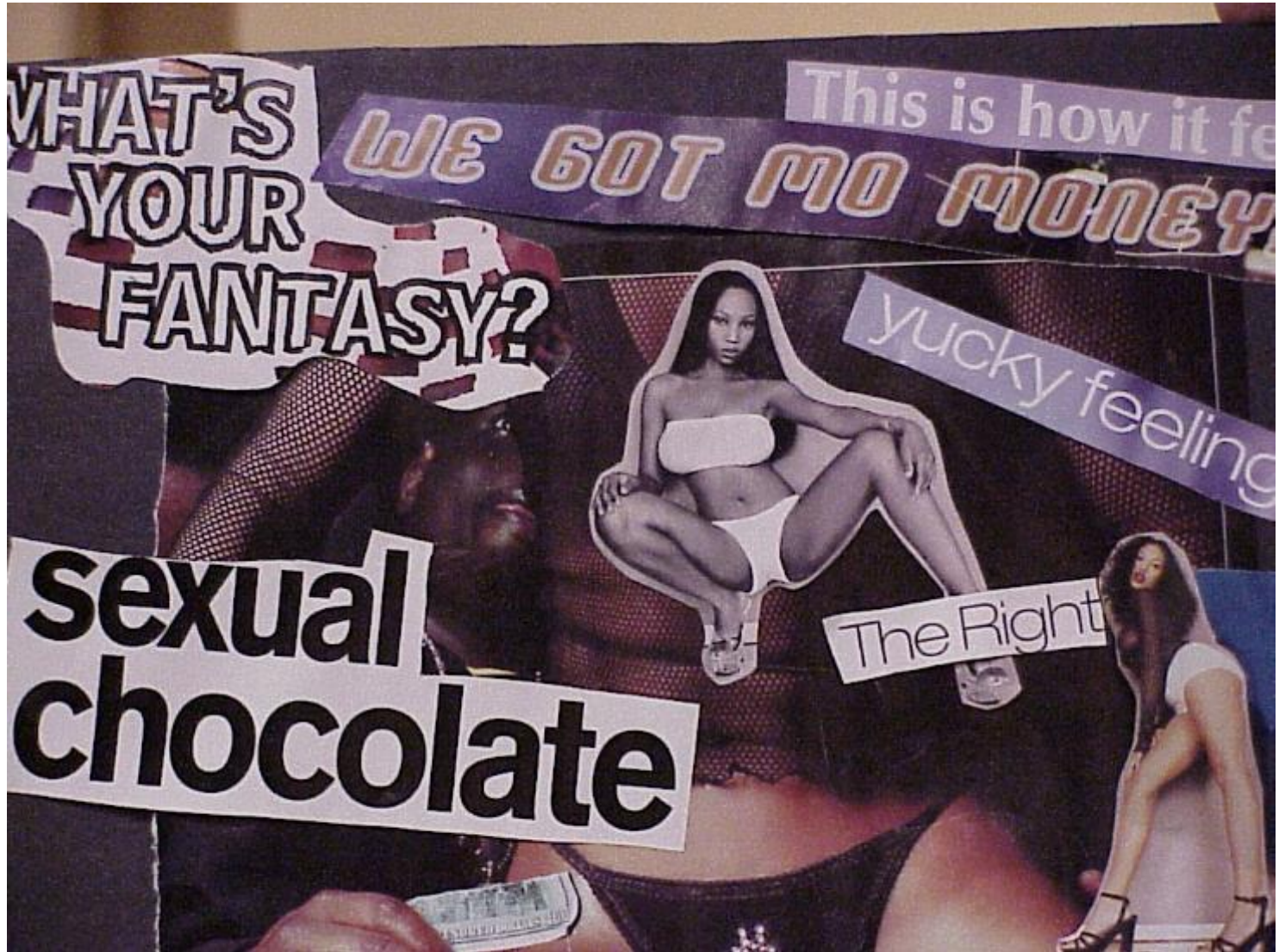
Google image search for “black men”:



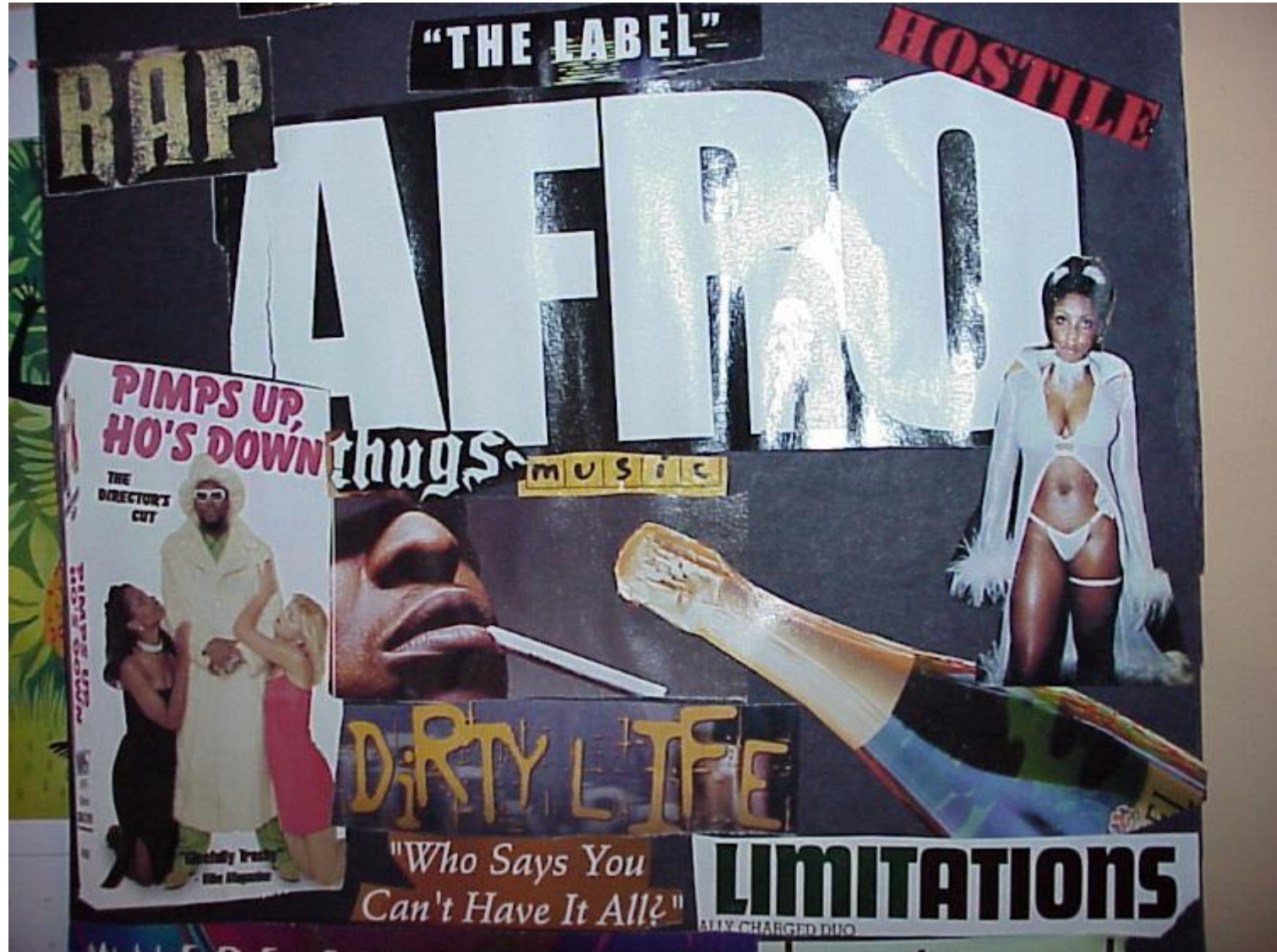
Google image search for “black women”:



Regular infusions of self-denigration lead to this generation's sense of self and legacy?



And how a teenaged African American male sees himself.....



Decolonization of the Mind

- The ability to view the world, specifically non-European cultures — in a non-Western perspective.
- Includes viewing our (people from non-European backgrounds) own cultures from different perspectives. This is the truest, yet most difficult form of decolonization
 - Decolonization is self-love: transformative process of growth

Implicit Associations

- Avoiding cognitive dissonance around issues related to bias
- Take the IAT test

Implications of Research by Atiba Goff

**→ effects of the dehumanization of
Black people on Black children**

“If you want to change a person the first thing you must do is to change their awareness of themselves”

Abraham Maslow

Until the lion has an historian the hunter will always be the hero.



The Seven Basic Things We need to Know in to Dismantle Colorism

- Racism & Racial Microaggressions
- Racial Stress
- Psychological Trauma
- Historical Trauma
- Internalized Racism
- Resiliency
- Community Healing and Emotional Emancipation

Applications

- Clinical / counseling
- Community based
- Education based

We Can Reverse Colorism





Thank You!